

Metaphors of 6th Grade Students Regarding the Culture Concept Included in the Social Studies Curriculum

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Abstract

This research aims to reveal the metaphors used by 6th grade secondary school students regarding the concept of culture in social studies. In this qualitative research study, the researchers interviewed 80 students – 40 girls and 40 boys – regarding their metaphors concerning the concept of culture. We conducted content analysis to analyze the data collected. We categorized the metaphors under five titles. These categories are cultural element, heritage, leader, continuity, and unifying. The study observed that the students mostly associated the concept of culture with the concept of history and tradition and defined the concept of culture mostly through cultural elements. In addition, in the study, the researchers observed that the participants did not develop a negative metaphor about the culture and perceived the beneficial aspects of the culture. We can say that the social studies course and the curriculum successfully foster a favorable perception of culture.

Keywords: social studies, social studies teaching, culture, student, metaphor.

1. Introduction

Culture, stemming from the Latin root “edere-cultura,” encompasses all the values and behaviours collectively shaping the way of life within a society (Mejuyev, 1987, find the source; Çelik & Güleç, 2023). Societies maintain their cultural elements by transferring them from generation to generation (Polat, 2019). Every society has its own culture that it tries to experience, and individuals derive meaning from this culture (Kafadar & Şen, 2021). Through culture, individuals, societies, and the states integrate and protect their material and spiritual values, and the values of culture, such as solidarity, justice, and benevolence, become the behavioural pattern of the society (Akpınar & Genç, 2016). While cultural transmission primarily occurred in the past through verbal and visual methods, today, media culture significantly influences this process. Generations come under the influence of global culture with the great influence of the media (Gençalp, 2019: 54). It is important for individuals exposed to the intense influence of the media to recognize and know their own cultures and cultural components. They must be conscious of their values and adopt a critical and inquisitive stance towards cultural messages rather than passively absorbing them (Çelik & Güleç, 2023). Cultural literacy is the key factor enabling individuals to acquire this skill.

Cultural literacy encompasses the ability to perceive the underlying realities of social behaviours, comprehend cultural shifts across past, present, and future contexts, and understand

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the elements that may threaten culture (Kafadar & Şan, 2021). Cultural literacy allows the individual to notice similar and different aspects of cultures (Köksal, 2010). If culture is likened to an iceberg, the visible part of the mountain consists of traditions, customs, clothing, dishes, and folk dances; the invisible part consists of roles, superstitions, values, and perceptions (Western Sydney University, 2023). In this context, cultural literacy education is important in understanding the existence of society and the individual (Keith, 2020). The continuity of society and states can be ensured through education, vital in imparting cultural literacy to individuals.

States use education to educate their societies and introduce their cultures, values, ideals, and elements they want to keep alive. After receiving their first education from their families, children acquire different cultural elements from kindergarten and first grade (Şahin, 2019). Social studies are a course that intensively introduces culture and its components in secondary school (Gürel & Çetin, 2018).

Social studies are an educational curriculum that integrates social and human sciences, encompassing disciplines like history, geography, and citizenship. Its purpose is to adapt to the evolving and progressing conditions of the nation and the global context (Öztürk, 2009: 4). First, in the USA, Social studies, originally developed to address the social challenges and issues arising from the post-World War I migration wave, has evolved into a curriculum adopted by numerous countries over time. As a reflection of social studies in Turkey, “History, Geography and Civics” courses were combined in 1962 and named “Society and Country Studies.” Subsequently, these courses were integrated into primary school curricula in 1968, and they were universally adopted under the label of “social studies” across all secondary schools in 1975 (Akyüz, 2009). In 1985-1986, the social studies course was abolished and “national history, national geography and citizenship knowledge” courses were introduced. It was combined again in 1998 under the social studies course (Boz, 2022). The 2005 and 2017 Social Studies Curriculum was last updated in 2018 and continues to be implemented (Şimşek, 2020). There are 18 specific objectives in the renewed program. When we analyse the Social Studies Course Curriculum considering the objectives established per the Fundamental Goals and Core Principles of Turkish National Education outlined in the National Education Basic Law No. 1739, it becomes evident that its primary aim is promoting cultural understanding. For example, the statement “*the objective is to comprehend the fundamental components and processes constituting Turkish culture and history, and to acknowledge the need to preserve and advance the cultural heritage that facilitates the formation of national consciousness*” demonstrates the presence of objectives about culture (Ministry of National Education, 2018). In this context, when the seven learning areas in social studies are examined, it is seen that there is a learning area called *Culture and Heritage* that directly deals with culture and cultural changes and concepts. However, the concept of culture is not only in the field of Culture and Heritage learning but also *in the fields of Individual and Society and Global Ties*. Social studies examine cultural issues from different perspectives at every grade level (Çelik & Güleç, 2023). In this sense, culture has an important place in social studies courses. However, the perceptions of the students about the concepts of culture and how they understand the culture are important. When we examine the literature, we can see many studies on culture in social studies. Up to August 2023, 25 research studies within this domain specifically focus on culture and the educational realm of “culture and Heritage” in social studies for master’s and doctoral studies.

When we mention some of these studies, they focus on cultural corruption, factors affecting culture, and approaches to cultural issues (Kılıç, 2023; Büyükçetin, 2023; Öztürk 2023; Maden, 2022; Çalımlı, 2021; Tekkök, 2019; Bozkurt, 2019, Ünlü, 2012; Sertkaya, 2010; Ateş, 2007; Yıldız, 2002). There are also many national articles on culture. When we examine literature, there are studies examining the role of the social studies program in cultural transfer (Çengelci, 2012; Gürel & Çetin, 2018; Çulha, 2009, Pehlivan & Kolaç, 2016); studies examining the opinions of teacher candidates and teachers about culture (Deveci, 2009; Akpınar & Cantürk, 2021; Aslan,

2017, İbrahimoglu, 2018); studies examining student opinions about culture (Kılcan & Akbaba, 2013; Ünlü, 2012; Arıkan, 2012); studies examining social studies textbooks in terms of culture (Çelik & Güleç, 2023; Batmaz and Yurtbakan, 2023); studies examining the metaphors of teacher candidates about the concept of culture (Alkar, 2023; Erdilmen Ocak, Çiydem & Mindivanlı Akdoğan, 2017; Thessaloniki Ay & Kurtdeğede Fidan, 2013). There are also international studies in the academic literature that explore the evolution of the concept of culture within the context of social studies education for students (Thongdee, Promkum, Sawatta, Namseethan & Ruangsang, 2021; Pacana, Chermen, Maryland & Reynaldo, 2019; Schleim, Taft & Ramsay, 2016; Hall, 2012). However, in recent studies, we can see that the subject of culture has shifted to cultural literacy in foreign literature (Helms, Trejo & Fultz, 2012; Septinai & Maftuh, 2020; Eguz, 2021; Dere & Ateş, 2022. Setemen, Widianan & Antara, 2023). Upon reviewing the existing literature, it becomes evident that there is a shortage of studies investigating secondary school students' metaphors concerning the concept of culture within the social studies curriculum. Hence, this research focused on investigating the metaphors employed by 6th grade students about the concept of culture.

This research aims to determine the concept of culture of 6th grade students in social studies. Although the social studies course includes culture and concepts related to culture intensively, how the students perceive the culture concept and how they connect with other concepts is important. In this study, we aimed to determine the metaphors of the students by using the "Culture is like, because" sentence. In the first sentence, we determined what the students likened the concept of culture to, and in the subsequent sentence, we explored how they likened it. This research has two problems, and the problems are shown below:

- (1) What are the cultural metaphors of 6th grade students?
- (2) Which category are the 6th grade students metaphors related to?

2. Method

2.1 Research design

This study is designed with a qualitative research method. The qualitative research method offers the opportunity to examine a case in depth and in a multi-faceted way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this study, we explored the metaphors of 6th grade students about the concept of culture because, in qualitative research, it is not only the behaviours and physical events that occur but also how people perceive events and how this affects their behaviour (Maxwell, 2018: 30).

2.2 Sample and data collection

First, the researchers prepared a metaphor form for the study. They used the form by Aydın (2010) and Nikitina and Fruako (2008) for the metaphor. The study group of the research consists of 80 students, 40 females and 40 males, studying in the 6th grade in Bursa in the 2022-2023 academic year. In the form, the researchers asked the students to complete the statements "Culture is like....., because". The forms collected from the female participants were coded as F1, F2, and F3..., respectively, and the forms collected from the male participants were coded as M1, M2, and M3..., respectively.

2.3 Analyzing of data

Content analysis is the state of downloading and interpreting qualitative data that determines the consistency and meanings of a massive qualitative material (Patton, 2014). The data collected from the students were analysed by content analysis. The researchers carried out the content analysis by following the stages of coding the data, finding the themes, organizing the codes and themes, and defining and interpreting the findings (Dilek, Baysan & Öztürk, 2018). The data were coded in the Excel program and categorized. All the students were able to create valid metaphors. The validity status of the data is shown below.

Table 1. Validity of the data collected

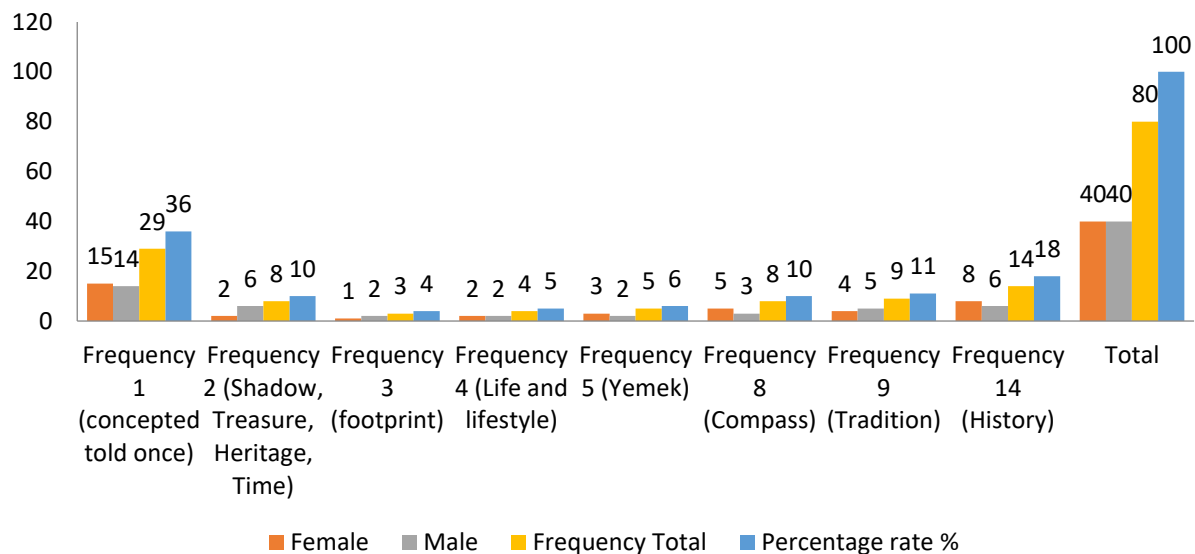
Form	Grade	Gender	Number	Total
Valid	6	Female	40	40
Valid	6	Male	40	40
Invalid	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	80	80

To enhance the validity and reliability of the study, the researchers provided a comprehensive and detailed explanation of the research process. Additionally, two researchers independently created the metaphors and categories and then compared them. They associated the metaphors with categories such as cultural component, heritage, leader, unifying, and continuity. The coders used the categories of similar studies on culture while creating the categories and increased reliability (Erdilmen Ocak, Çiydem & Mindivanlı Akdoğan, 2017; Akyol & Kızıltan, 2019). Consequently, to enhance reliability, the researchers assessed the number of consensus and disagreements between them and determined their consistency using the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (2016). It was seen that 6 out of 80 data were associated with different categories and changed. Consistency among coders was calculated as 92%.

3. Results

3.1 Results regarding the metaphors of the students on the concept of culture

The researchers examined the metaphors of 80 students, 40 female and 40 males, regarding the concept of culture. The graph below shows the metaphors and frequency values of the students.

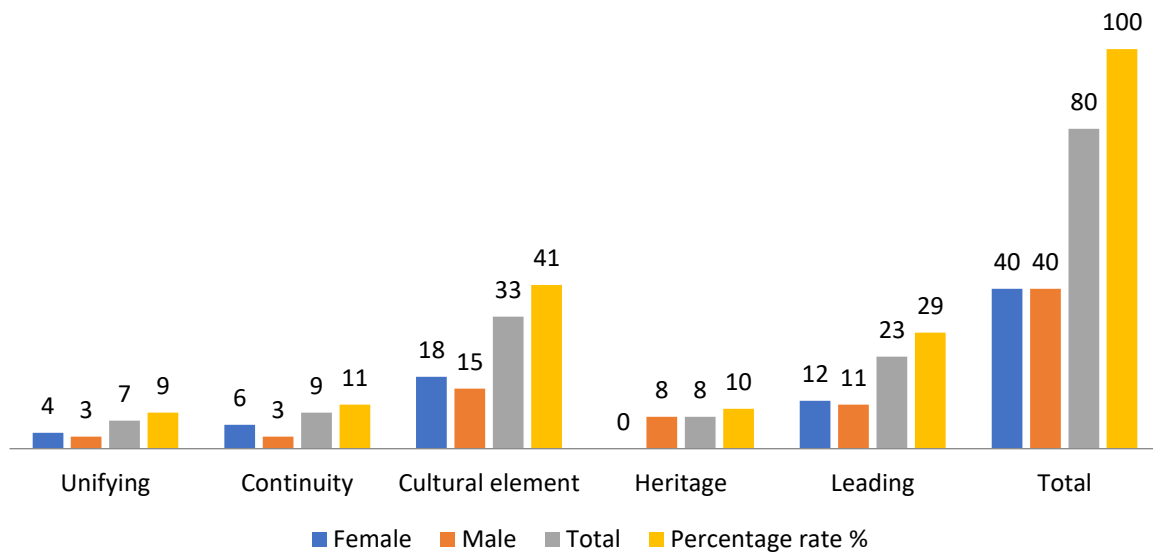
Graph 1. 6th grade students' metaphors about culture and frequency values of metaphors

Upon examination of the graph 1 above, it is seen that there are concepts with the highest rate and 1 frequency (29). These concepts are *tree, fate, handcuffs, eternity, belonging, humanity, architecture, art, motherland, pearl, architecture, art history, our ancestors, light, nation, solidarity, law, book, nation, our unity, gift, forest*. The students associated culture with these concepts used once in various ways. *People may think that the participants developed meaning through different concepts of culture.* The concept that students most frequently associate with is “history,” occurring 14 times. This observation could be attributed to the extensive utilization of history within the 6th-grade social studies curriculum. The other most common concepts are tradition with nine frequencies and compass with 8 frequencies. The reason why tradition has 9 frequencies may be because it is a concept that participants often witness in social life. The participants’ analogy to the compass may be because they think the culture is the leader. Concepts with 2 frequencies are shadow, treasure, heritage, and time. The perception of culture as a shadow, treasure, or heritage from the past by students may be influenced by the idea that culture is a transmitted phenomenon. On the other hand, time can show that they think that culture is a phenomenon that has endured from past to present and has evolved over time but has always existed. When all ratios are examined in terms of gender variables, it can be said that there is no significant difference, and the values are close to each other.

3.2 Results regarding the categories to which the cultural metaphors of 6th grade students belong

The categories to which the participants’ metaphors about culture belong are “.... Was created after the Because....” section. The researchers created five categories by unveiling the aspects of the concepts that the participants likened. In the graph below, categories are given with gender distribution.

Graph 2. Frequencies of the categories created according to the cultural metaphors of the participants



Upon examining Graph 2, it becomes evident that the category with the highest frequency is the cultural element, with a value of 41%. The concepts in the cultural element are *architecture, game, food, clothing, tradition, history, art history, and difference*. To give an example from the form of the participants in this regard, the female participant F 20 said: “*Culture is like history because our history teaches us about our past*”. In contrast, the male participant M 26 said: “*Culture is like tradition because we live and keep our traditions alive*”. The second category is the leader category, with a value of 29%. In the leader category, there are the concepts of *forest, compass, footprint, lifestyle, fate, humanity, motherland, shadow, law*. On this issue, F21 stated: “*Culture is like a compass because it shows us how to do something and where to go*”. In contrast, M19 stated: “*Culture is like a shadow because we are protected under it and know our limits*”. The least emphasized category of culture was unifying, with a value of 9%. In this regard, *togetherness, our unity, belonging, handcuffs, tree, our home, happiness* are stated. In this regard, participant F 32 said: “*Culture is like our unity because our common values and beliefs unite us thanks to culture*”. In contrast, male participant M 40 said, “*Culture is like happiness because it shows us what we will be happy for*”. Significant differences in the distribution of female and male participants by categories are in the heritage category with a value of 10%. This category encompasses the concepts of *pearl, heritage, nation, treasure, gift, book*. Eight male participants stated all concepts here. There are no statements from female participants included in this context. To give an example from the male participants, M 70 wrote: “*Culture is like heritage because it is left to us by our ancestors to sustain it*”. There is no significant difference in gender in other categories, which could be attributed to the students sharing the same classroom and curriculum for social studies. Their teachers may emphasize similar aspects while teaching cultural subjects.

4. Discussion

This study has unveiled the metaphors created by 6th grade students regarding the concept of culture, which is prominently featured in the social studies curriculum. The categories of the concepts were created in the part of the study that continues with “because...”. The study’s

findings indicated that students associated the concept of culture with various elements such as history, tradition, food, and clothing, which vary among cultures but serve as tangible representations of culture. Participants associated culture extensively with the elements of culture, as in social studies. Culture is paired with the concepts of the compass, shadow, fate, and footprint for the leader category. Their analogy with concepts such as belonging, handcuffs, and our home demonstrates their comprehension of the unifying nature of culture. Their likening of culture to concepts such as heritage, gift, and treasure shows that students recognize the characteristics of culture as a transferred heritage. In this context, based on the results of this study, the achievements that the social studies curriculum wants to give students about the concept of culture are realized as a thought under the categories of cultural element, unifying, leader, heritage, and continuity.

Participants associated the concept of culture with concepts such as heritage, gifts, and our ancestors. These metaphors are consistent with the characteristic of being the social heritage in which the culture is transferred from generation to generation, as expressed by Özkul (2013). When the categories are examined in terms of gender variables, the rates of girls and boys in the categories are close to each other. There is a significant difference only in the heritage category. In this category, there are cultural metaphors of 8 male participants. In this regard, it was observed that there was no significant difference in terms of gender variables in the studies of Erdilmen Ocak, Çiydem and Mindivanlı Akdoğan (2017) on the concept of culture. The researchers categorized the concepts obtained in the study into five groups: cultural element, heritage, unifying, leader, and continuity. In the studies of Çelikten (2006) and Akyol and Kızıltan (2019), there is a category related to the unifying aspect of culture. The studies mutually reinforce the notion of culture as a unifying element. In the study, the researchers observed that the students did not have a negative judgment about the culture.

As a result of the research, it was seen that there was no negative metaphor about culture. This demonstrates that students develop a constructive metaphor for culture. Based on the study, the following suggestions can be included: *students can be taken to ethnographic museums when covering topics related to culture.*

Practical studies can be carried out to improve students' perceptions of culture. Different components of culture can also be emphasized in lessons. The concept of culture can be addressed with more concrete examples. Students can be enabled to embody the culture.

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